

April 2, 1964

Parker 2

Dear mom and dad:

I have no excuse for not writing before this as I did not go to Mississippi and spent the vacation here in Atlanta. I did stay busy however and never quite got a chance to write - much less study. After losing so much time picking up Mermie we hit heavy rain in North Carolina and did not get into Atlanta until 9:30 A. M. Thursday morning. Marcia and John had waited until 7 A. M. but then decided to go on without me. Mermie and I debated going on to Mississippi but then decided to stay in Atlanta. I knew a girl who had an apartment and in describing her to Mermie we discovered that she was one of Mermie's high school friends who lived just down the road from her in Rosemont. So we stayed with Judy and attended the SNCC Conference Friday and Saturday.

The most momentous thing about this Conference was the singing. We sang Freedom songs before every meeting and all Friday night. The SNCC kids working in Mississippi, South West Georgia and other rural areas of the South needed to feel the unity and the oneness of the whole organization singing in one voice "Oh Freedom" and "We Shall Overcome" and all the other freedom songs. Friday night the group's singing swelled into one voice which sang out from the Chapel and into the streets. Everyone was singing, everyone was totally involved, for "We Shall Overcome" we all joined hands and became physically one. And when we sang the verse "Black and White together" we said "now" instead of "some day" and everyone raised their hands and you could see black hands and brown hands and white hands all clasped together in one whole.

"Freedom Songs" with their old spiritual music are mesmerizing. You can't help but feel involved. The clapping and/or swaying adds to the participation in the whole. There are no instruments. We make the music with our voices, our hands and our feet.

April 6, 1964

I have found it hard to sit down and write because I have too much to say and too much that I cannot say. My personality coupled with the color of my skin has gotten me into a lot of trouble down here. This is something I cannot explain until we are together because it has to do with suspicion and misunderstanding and race consciousness. The problems I am having with people here are the same problems I have had other places but now they are complicated and accentuated by race. If only you could realize how we whites have closed so many doors of communication with our fellow men who have negro blood within them; how we have hurt them so much that they have become suspicious and over-sensitive to insult and have hardened themselves to any sharing of love because they fear being hurt. I feel helpless because I am being misunderstood and because I don't know how to relate to those who dislike me.

I have become good friends with a few kids here - especially with the Canterbury kids. I have never been a person with a lot of friends but rather one with a few close friends. But here race always enters the picture and if I hold aloof from some people they feel it is because I think I am superior to them because I am white and their skin is black. This is not true. I don't see color but they do. I forget what color people are but then I haven't had a white man kicking me and telling me I'm worth less than his dog all my life either.

I feel tired at times and I become depressed about my weaknesses. I

April 6, 1964 (continued)

need so much the help of the Holy Spirit and yet I feel so alone and so far away from God at times. Pray for me that I may be given the strength to love those who do not love me and the sensitivity to know how to love them .

All the things you have accused me of being I am down here, but race has made them take on a different color. I know I am a snob. I try not to be but middle class people who put their values on material possessions depress me and bore me. I know I am prejudiced against the middle class even though I am of the middle class myself. I couldn't be in a more middle class college than Spelman. The negroes have tried so hard to be middle class so we would accept them. I know the middle class of America is not happy. Love is what they need not rejection. I find it so hard to live with the concept that there is a little bit of God in every middle class person. I can see God in the lower classes and in the prostitutes, dope addicts and alcoholics. But the hypocrisy of middle class America frustrates me and I find it very hard to feel love towards those who advocate and support a hypocritical society. When you say you are concerned about the poverty in the U. S. do you really mean it? Are you willing to give half your earnings to another family which has nothing? Are you willing to take the coat off your back? Do you realize that the budget for Johnson's war on poverty is less than what we spend in six months in Vietnam to kill and destroy a country? May God forgive us for the evils we are committing to our own people and to the peoples of the world while we swim in our swimming pools and wear our fine clothes and allow them to suffer and live wretched lives because we love our own pleasures too much to care about others enough to sacrifice for them.

I told you on the phone Saturday night that I wanted to work at this Social Work Camp in New York State. Now I am not sure. I made myself promise that I would go back north this summer because I did not believe that the northerner had a right to be in the fight in the south. I have seen that the fight in the south is everybody's fight because we are all citizens of the United States and the rights of all citizens are being denied in the south, especially in Mississippi and Alabama. Recognizing that this fight was my fight I then resolved that I would volunteer my services full time to SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) or to SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) as soon as I graduated from Carleton. But yesterday I found out that Dr. Staughton Lynd had accepted the job of heading the Freedom Schools project in Mississippi this summer. He is a professor at Spelman and will be at Yale next Fall. I have him for a non-violent seminar and respect him very much. I am now considering very seriously working for SNCC in the Freedom School if they want me. The Civil Rights Groups hope to send between 1,000 and 1,500 people into Mississippi this summer to set up community centers, teach in freedom schools and do voter registration. They plan to concentrate on Mississippi and really open that state. They hope to have kids from every state in the Union. It is going to be an important summer for the Civil Rights Movement especially with the election this fall. They plan to send representatives to the Democratic Convention representing those negroes in Mississippi who are being denied their right to vote by Mississippi's constitution. They are going to request to be seated and should cause the Democratic Party to make some sort of stand.

There will be danger in going to Mississippi but I trust Dr. Lynd that he will see that we are trained well in non-violent, loving methods of meeting hatred. I respect Dr. Lynd and have faith in a program he will be heading.

~~If I am accepted for the program and if I decide to go I will need about \$100 for living expenses plus travel money. I am hoping our Church and other~~

April 6, 1964 (continued)

~~Churches in our area would contribute so that I could go on the program and still have some money for expenses at school next year. I will write Crofton and ask him for a definite answer as he never answered my letter last Fall.~~

May God keep you all safe and well until I am with you again,

Love,

Pam